Every Number Tells a Story

Suggested Grade Levels: 4-6
Subject: Language Arts/Math
Character: Responsibility

Materials and technology to be used:

- "Homeless Animals in my Community" research guide – **x1 per student**
- Large whiteboard and marker – **x1**
- Computers and/or tablets – **x1 per student (if possible) or x1 per small group**
- Large photos of local shelter pets – **x3 or more**
- Phone books (optional) – **x1 per small group**
- Sticky notes – **x1 per student**
- Pencils – **x1 per student**
- Paper – **x1 per student**

Objective(s):

Students will understand what the term "overpopulation" means. They will also understand the work being done by local animal shelters on behalf of this problem and the importance of community involvement in this work to combat pet overpopulation.

Anticipatory Set/Hook:

Ask students: "How many companion animals enter US shelters every year?" Have students turn and talk with a neighbor. Listen to a few guesses. ***6.5 million***. Have three or more photos of local, adoptable pets posted on the whiteboard with either their real, or made-up, identification numbers written below them. Tell students that *these animals are at the local shelter and are desperately searching for a "forever" home.* Ask students: "Why are these animals at the shelter? How do you think they got there?" Call on a couple of volunteers to share their thoughts. Ask students: "Why do we have SO many animals at shelters across the US? How can we fix this problem?" Do not ask for answers, yet. Tell students that *shelter animals are not just statistics and numbers, but living, breathing creatures – just like we are. Each deserves to have a full life.* Tell students that today they are going to get to explore the questions above as they investigate the shocking statistics of local animal shelters.

Lesson Beginning:

1. Define "population" and discuss examples of populations of people, pets, and wild animals. ***Population*** = *all the inhabitants of a particular town, area, or country*

2. Ask: "Has anyone ever heard of the word *'overpopulation'*?" Call on select students to explain their definitions. Define "overpopulation" and discuss the issue of "pet overpopulation" ….

   "Pet overpopulation" *means that there are too many pets being born and not enough homes for them all. Because people take care of pets, they are also in charge of their populations. Over the course of many years, our society has not properly controlled pet populations and we now have many pets that are ending up at animal shelters, like the Nebraska Humane Society, and others are without homes and living on the dangerous streets.*

3. Review any other details regarding the pet overpopulation problem in your specific community.

4. Explain the following to students and pose an array of questions that will appeal to their empathy: *There are thousands of companion animals just in shelters throughout the state of Nebraska. Each animal is identified by a number, but behind that number is a story of a real life…. Why did they get lost? Why were they unwanted? Do they have a name? Why was the bond between the owner and animal broken? Did anyone ever love and care for them? Do they know what it is like to be loved and happy? Why were some abused and neglected? How do they feel in a shelter or animal control facility? If they could talk, what would they say?*

Middle of Lesson:

1. Reiterate that *shelter animals are not just statistics or numbers. They are each their own beautiful, unique creature that deserves the best life possible. Tell students that the reason that animal numbers are so high at shelters is a direct relation to the* **pet overpopulation problem**. *Until the number of animals being born is lowered, shelters will be full of unwanted animals.*

2. Pose a question to the class – "How can we solve this terrible problem of pet overpopulation?". Have students write their ideas on a sticky note and place it on the board. Review all notes out loud.

3. Explain what "spay" and "neuter" surgery is and why it is so important.

   These are two different types of surgeries that make animals unable to have babies. Pets that

have this simple surgery will not have litters of unwanted babies. They will also be healthier and live longer lives, because this surgery helps to prevent various types of cancer and infections. It can also help pets become friendlier and less aggressive. The NHS has five, full-time, skilled veterinarians who spay and neuter all dogs, cats, and rabbits before they are adopted out. This in turn limits the number of animals without homes in the world.

End of Lesson:

1. Tell students that they are going to get the opportunity to research different animal rescues/shelters in the area in order to learn more about the important work that they do for the community.

2. Split students up into smaller groups of 2-3. Allow them to spread out around the room and choose their own "think space." Provide each student with a piece of paper, writing utensil, and a tablet.

3. Instruct students to consult the internet (or even a telephone directory) for a listing of animal welfare organizations (smaller rescue groups and shelters) in their local community.

   -You may wish to give each student a computer or tablet for this research, if possible, or one tablet per small group. Each student will be responsible for writing their groups findings down on their own piece of paper.

   -After compiling their lists, ask each group to share their findings out loud. Write down all the different animal rescue groups and animal shelters that the students found on the whiteboard.

4. Have the students go back to their individual desks and bring their tablets with them.

5. Pass out a "Homeless Animals in my Community" research guide to each student.

6. Tell each student to pick one animal rescue group or animal shelter to research further on their tablet. They should begin their research by looking up the animal shelter/rescue group's website and navigating the facts on there.

   - They may also wish to search for local news articles and research papers that were written about their rescue group or animal shelter as well (make sure to explain how news articles can sometimes be biased, though, and are typically not good sources for research).

7. Help students identify pertinent questions regarding homeless animals in your community. These questions will be used to guide their research...

Examples:

- What different kinds of animals are brought into this shelter?
- How many animals are brought in every day?
- Why do you call it "adopting" animals instead of "buying" an animal?
- What is the most unique "story" that accompanied an animal to this shelter?
- What kinds of jobs do the employees and volunteers do for the shelter and animals?

- Have each student create two additional questions of their own that will aid in providing insight into the unique and necessary work that animal shelters provide for the community.

8. Once all questions have been established, have students complete their "Homeless Animals in my Community" research guide.

- For any questions that students cannot find answers to online, you can invite a guest speaker from that organization into your classroom for an "interview". The Nebraska Humane Society's Education Department is happy to assist and can be reached at **402-444-7800 ext 2214**.

Closure:

1. Provide students with 1 minute to reflect on today's lesson. Have them think about what they learned, what they enjoyed, and what questions they still have.

2. Ask: "How are animal rescue groups and animal shelters helping to combat the pet overpopulation problem?" Answer to a neighbor. Listen to student conversations to assess understanding.

3. Revisit the unanswered questions from the "Anticipatory Set" of the lesson: "Why do we have SO many animals at shelters across the US? How can we fix this problem?" Have all students answer these questions on an "Exit Ticket" to be turned in. Discuss – *Because people are not being responsible pet owners and doing their research before they get a pet **and** they are not spaying/neutering their pets.* ***Spay and neuter!***

Name: _____

Homeless Animals in my Community

Name of animal rescue or animal shelter:

_____

1. What different kinds of animals are brought into this shelter?

2. How many animals are brought in every day?

3. Why do you call it "adopting" animals instead of "buying" an animal?

4. What is the most unique "story" that accompanied an animal to this shelter?

5. What kinds of jobs do the employees and volunteers do for the shelter and animals?

Additional questions:

1._____

2._____